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Phase I Archaeological Survey
at Old Columbus, Kentucky

By

Michael J. McNerney

Prepared for

Great River Marine Services
Columbus, Kentucky

Prepared by

American Resources Group, Ltd.
Carbondale, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

A 30 by 50 meter area on the east bank of the Mississippi River at Old Columbus, Kentucky was examined for prehistoric and historic cultural remains. No cultural materials or evidence of occupation was found within the proposed construction area. However, historic structural remains and historic artifacts were located south of the project area. These remains are briefly reported.

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Introduction

This cultural resources survey and assessment was carried out for Great Rivers Marine Services (G.R.M.S.) as authorized by Section 10 of the River and Harbor Act of 1899, Section 404 of Clean Water Act, and Section 103 of the Marine, Protection, Research, and Sanctuaries Act. Archaeological and historical surveys and assessments are also required for federally permitted projects under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, Executive Order 11593 of May 13, 1971, National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974, and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979.

G.R.M.S. proposes to construct a concrete ramp approximately 18 feet long and 16 feet wide bordered by 4 feet of cyclopean rip-rap (Figure 1 & 2). The proposed construction area is 30 m east-west and 50 m north-south. Some grading will occur north of Kentucky Route 58; however, much of the construction will occur at the end of Route 58 which G.R.M.S. is using as a ramp at this time and which previously served as a landing for the Columbus-Belmont Ferry (Figure 3). Field work was conducted on May 17, 1989 by Michael J. McNerney.

Setting

The project area is located in the Lower Mississippi alluvial valley at Old Columbus, Hickman County, Kentucky. Construction will occur on the river bank at an elevation ranging from 300' to 310' ASL.

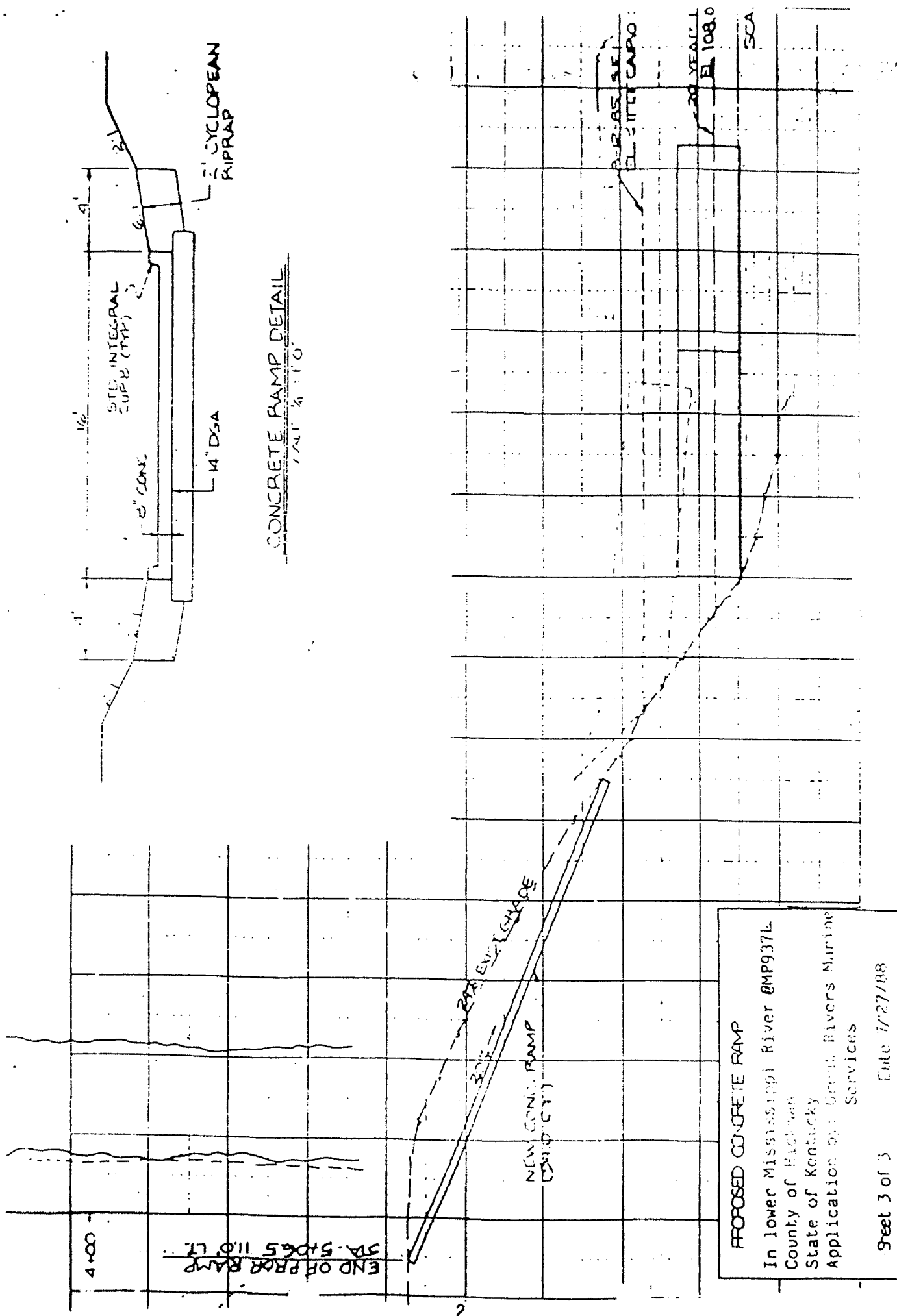


Figure 1. Construction plan for proposed concrete ramp.

Kentucky
Carlisle County

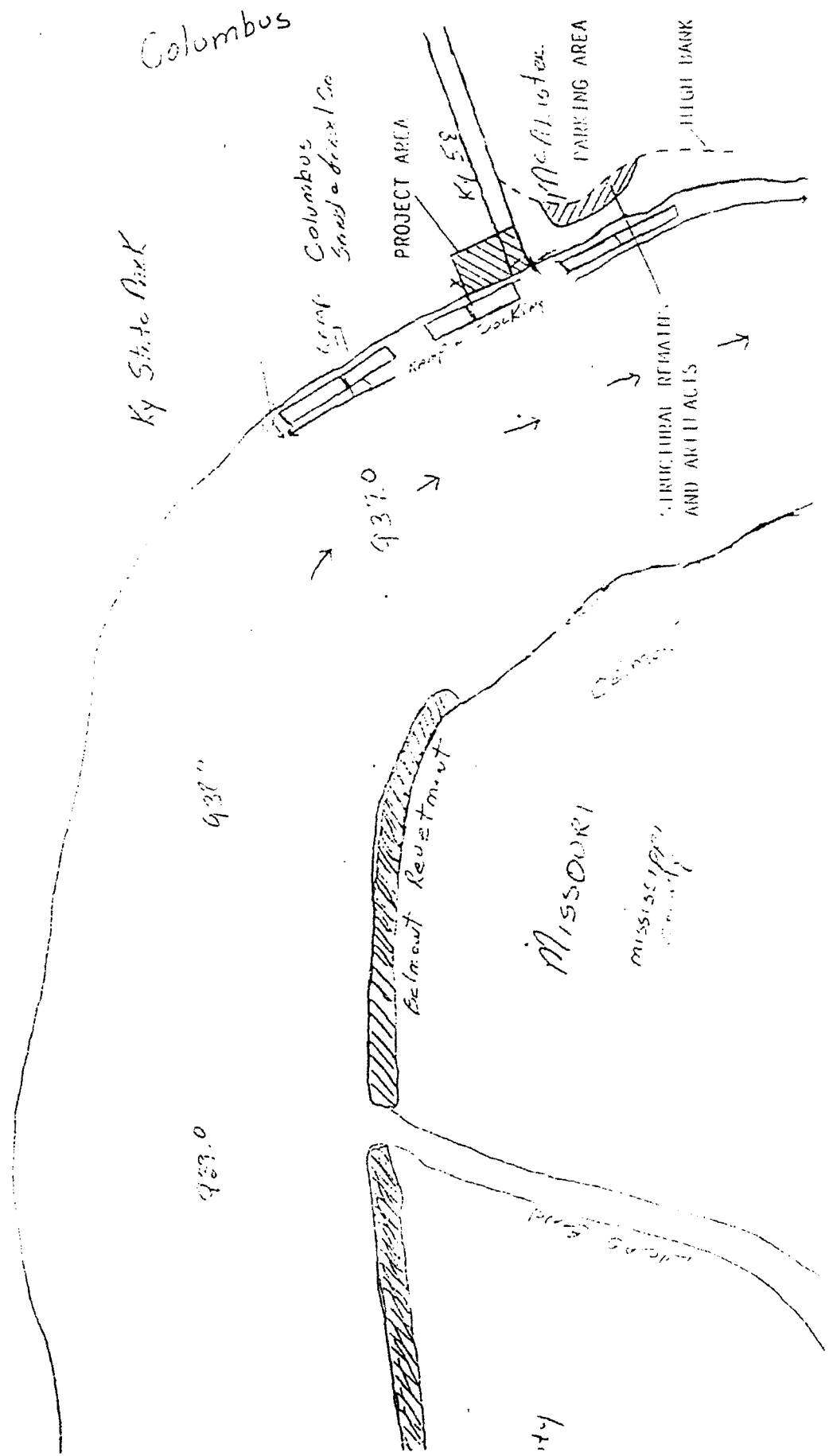


Figure 2. Project area, sketch map provided by G.R.M.S.

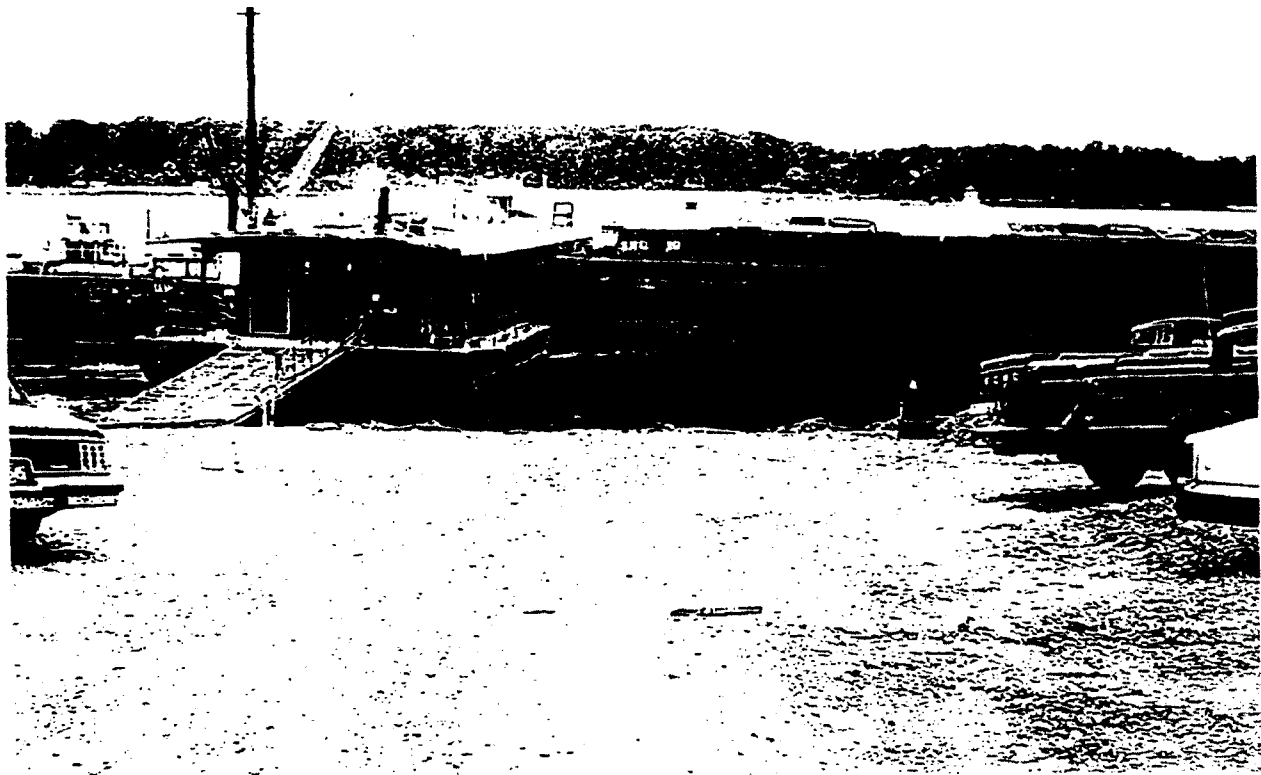


Figure 3. G.R.M.S. facilities and the termination of Kentucky Route 58.

To the north and east high bluffs rise 150' to 200' above the floodplain. South of the area the hills recede to the east and the floodplain broadens (Figure 4). Soils are typical alluvial deposits consisting of alternating layers of silt, clay, and sand. Except for the sloping area created by the extension of Kentucky Route 58 the river bank is steep rising 1.50 to 3.0 meters above the river.

Methods

Records and literature pertaining to the Columbus area was examined as were archival sources at the Hickman County Courthouse. There has been no recent archaeological investigations conducted in the immediate Columbus area; however, prehistoric investigations have been carried out by the University of Illinois in recent years in surrounding counties (Dave Pollock, Personal communication, May 1989).

Field methods consisted of shovel test at 10 meter intervals, surface examination of all exposed areas, and the shovel scraping of the exposed river bank. A small sample of diagnostic historic artifacts was collected from the area south of the proposed construction site.

Historical Background

Columbus was plotted between 1822 and 1827 (Deed Book A, Hickman County Courthouse) although it is likely that there was considerable knowledge of the area and possibly temporary settlement at a much earlier date. The towering rust stained soils that form the high bluffs at Columbus were known to the French as La Rivage de Fer or Iron Banks. A block house may have been erected on the site in 1804 (Owings 1974).

The town flourished throughout the steamboat era and when the railroads arrived it became a major transfer point where trains were ferried between Missouri and Illinois. At the beginning of the Civil War, General Polk with several thousand confederate troops constructed Fort De Russey on the bluffs above Columbus. The location was heavily fortified and massively armed to prevent the Union Army from using the Mississippi River. Rising high above the surrounding terrain and located on the river, the fort was likened to that massive rock at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea and was referred to as the "Gibraltar of the West."

As the railroads replaced the steamboats, the town began to decline. A series of disastrous fires and continued flooding finally resulted in moving what was left of the town to high ground in 1928.

Figure 5 shows the total area being leased by G.R.M.S., the project area, and the approximate east bank of the river on an 1871 map of Columbus. This gives some idea of the area of the old town that has been claimed by the Mississippi River.

Results of Survey

Shovel testing, scraping of the exposed river bank at 6 locations, and careful examination of all exposed surfaces within the construction area failed to yield evidence of prehistoric or historic occupation. Severe erosion from run-off along the north side of route 58 has removed a large portion of the river bank within the project area (Figure 6). This condition along with recent use of the area as a landing appears to have removed any evidence of previous occupation.



Figure 5. 1871 plat of Old Columbus showing project area and present east bank of the Mississippi River.

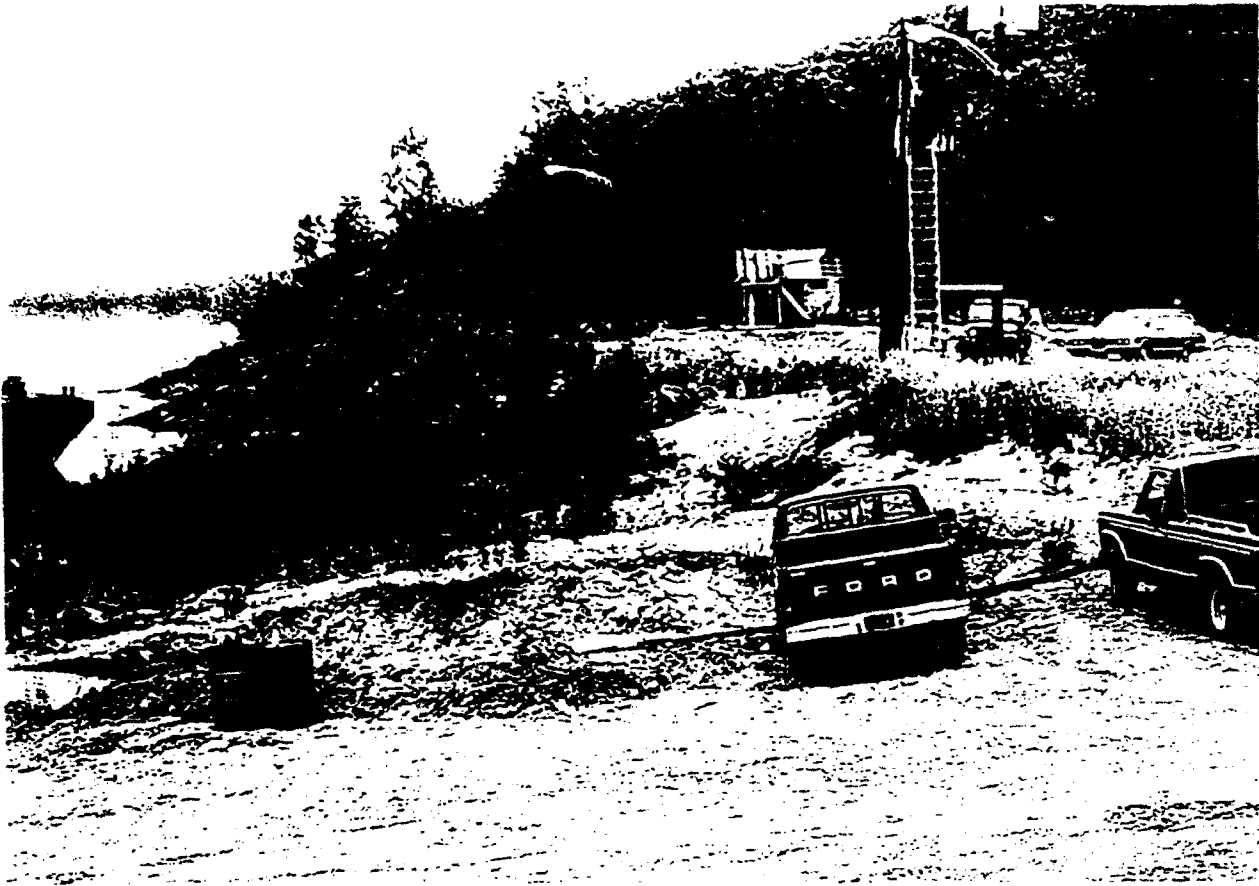


Figure 6. Proposed construction area.

Fifteen meters south of route 58 and outside of the proposed construction area the remains of a brick structure were exposed in the river bank (Figure 7). Approximately 5 meters further south of these structural remains were what appeared to be the remains of a cistern. Historic artifacts were also scattered along the river bank in the vicinity of these features. A sample of diagnostic artifacts is presented below.



Figure 7. Structural remains south of the project area.

Table 1

Artifact Inventory
Old Columbus, Kentucky

Ceramics

Thick walled ironstone (9)

- 2 - "Laurel" motif 1860's
- 1 - H. Meakin maker's mark 1873-1876
- 1 - Other lion and unicorn maker's mark 1842-1895
- 1 - J.G. Meakin (with Fuchsia motif) 1860's
- 1 - "Lillies of the Valley" motif 1858-1860's
- 3 - Undecorated

Stoneware (3)

- 1 - Salt glaze with Albany slip interior
hand thrown jar with lug handle ca. 1850-1900
- 1 - Salt glaze with cobalt blue stencil decoration
Jas. Hamilton & Co. 1850-1880 "Eagle Pottery",
Owensboro, Pennsylvania
Albany slip interior - hand thrown - straight sided
with lug handle
- 1 - Unglazed molded rim

Glass

- 1 - Clear paneled medicine bottle - snap case 1858-1903
Scovill & Co. Cinti & New York ca. 1857-1881 (maybe castor oil)
- 1 - Clear closure - ground for stopper - improved tooled
- 2 - Brown bitter's bottle - probably Drakes Plantation Bitters
ca. 1862-1885

Although these archaeological remains are beyond the impact area (Jerry Deal, Personal communication), they demonstrate that meaningful historical archaeological data is present at Old Columbus.

Recommendations

Careful examination of the proposed construction site failed to yield evidence of prehistoric or historic archaeological remains. Therefore, it is recommended that construction of the ramp way proceed without adverse impacts to significant cultural resources. The structural remains identified south of the construction site should be clearly flagged and avoided during the construction.

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